

“Called to Be . . . An Embassy”

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near Midland, Ontario, on the occasion of its 7th anniversary.*

2nd Corinthians 5.14-20

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Christ’s love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.

So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come! The old has gone, the new is here!

All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation. God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.

We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God.

2nd Corinthians 5.14-20
(New International Version; adapted)

Thank you! Thank you for letting me into your celebration. As Unity United Church, you all being together is something God is doing here.

I serve with two congregations, and I share their greetings. Elora United is 180-ish years old. Bethany United is 172-ish. I say “ish” because no one remembers anymore. Your Unity United is turning seven. You remember well the hopes and dreams, as well as the worries and losses that accompanied your beginning. Thank you for risking being a church, whom God gathers here.

The Bible gives us ways to imagine ourselves as church. You are partnering in Jesus together.¹ You are called out by God to do public business together.² You are a choir,

¹ The Greek word for this sharing partnership is *koinonia*. See 1st John 1.1-19.

² A called-out assembly was an *ekklesia*. These words had secular meanings, which early Christians adopted to describe their own fellowships. See the repeated use of *ekklesia* in Romans 16.

singing to God.³ You are married to Jesus, his bride for whom he gave himself.⁴ You are Jesus' body, the Spirit's temple, a household, a people.⁵

And, you are an embassy.

II

The funeral service for Ken Taylor was this week. Remember him? In 1977 he became Canada's ambassador to Iran. The Shah still ruled Iran then, but two years later he was overthrown by a revolution led by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. Then, a mob stormed the American Embassy and took its staff hostage. However, six diplomats escaped, and Ambassador Taylor and his wife, along with another Canadian couple, hid them for more than 2 months until they could be secreted out of the country to safety.

Keep that story in mind, as we think together about what ambassadors and embassies do. How can that shape what you do as this embassy of ambassadors, Unity United Church?

What does a good ambassador do?

III

Ambassadors speak on their country's behalf.

Even with modern communications, having face-to-face conversations is vital if we are going to understand each other. Especially when there is tension or conflict. (If you've ever tried to have a healthy feud by email, you might know what I mean.) Ambassadors do that.

Taylor's formal title was *Her Majesty's Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Canada to Iran*. (I'm glad I didn't have to answer his phone!) Notice whom he represented . . . the Queen, our head of state, and her government, then led by Prime Minister Joe Clark. Taylor did not speak for himself. He represented someone else.

Who does your embassy, this congregation, represent?

IV

To represent their home country, **ambassadors must understand their host country.**

Iran is an ancient nation, with a rich and sophisticated culture. And, a revolution was

³ Revelation 15.2-4

⁴ Ephesians 5.18b,21-33

⁵ Body of Christ: 1st Corinthians 12.12-31; Temple of the Spirit: 1st Corinthians 3.16 and 6.19; Household of God: Ephesians 2.11-22; People of God: 1st Peter 2.9-10.

brewing. Ken Taylor had to understand it. To do that, he had to get to know people.

As Jesus' ambassadors, we need to be close to people outside this embassy. We immerse ourselves in our neighbourhoods. Your neighbourhoods might be the streets around your home. They might be your school, or your workplace. They might be the sideroad your farm is on. Know your neighbours. Build relationships. That's ambassador work. An ambassador cannot be consumed with keeping the embassy running. That is important, but only insofar as it serves her purpose: representing her home country to her host community.

V

However, while ambassadors are immersed in their host country, **they belong to their home**. Their loyalty is to their home. They speak for their home. They express their home country's values and priorities. They know their home government's policies, so they can represent and advocate for them. They remain rooted in their home. They can love and appreciate their hosts, but their belonging is elsewhere.

When the fugitive diplomats showed up at his door, Taylor acted according to his Canadian values. What do you imagine the Iranians thought when they found out? He lived in Iran, but he was not Iranian. His priorities and values were different.

As you represent Jesus in your place, you will sometimes stand out. Sometimes you will be celebrated for it. Sometimes, you will be criticized.

As I heard about your refugee initiative, I thought of my Elora congregation. This morning, they are getting an update about something called *Project Welcome*. Our church is anchoring this community-wide effort to welcome refugees into our neighbourhoods. Some in our town are very happy we are doing this, and want to get involved. Others are not so happy. They have questions. They are worried. Some think we are wrong. And, frankly, some are hateful.

As Jesus' ambassadors in our community, we need to listen. We need to engage. We need to act lovingly to these neighbours who are close at hand, including those who are not liking us much right now. Also, we need to act lovingly to our neighbours who are far away and in desperate need, because we represent Jesus. We are looking at what he has done and is doing now. We are being shaped by his policies and priorities.

The *Holy Spirit* gathers you here, but not to represent yourselves. You represent *Jesus*.

VI

Ambassadors show others what their home is like.

Taylor's actions showed the best of Canadian ideals. (The only Canadian thing he did not do was apologize!) He was not flashy. *"I've wondered if I'm not more like Austin Powers than James Bond,"* he has said.⁶ Joe Clark said this week that *". . . it was a very Canadian thing to do."*⁷ Americans were grateful to us. Taylor later said that, in the days and weeks after word got out of what they had done, *"[Canadians in the States] couldn't [pay for] a beer. They couldn't get a traffic ticket. They got free rides on buses."*⁸ He did us proud.

You, Unity United Church, Jesus' embassy here, you show others what he is like, and what he is doing.

In the Scripture today we heard: *"If anyone is in Christ, the New Creation has come."* God who crafted the first Creation is now fashioning you, and you all, anew. All things, as they are brought into Christ, God makes new. Jesus sends us as representatives of his New Creation. He sends us to show it within the old world.

We heard: *"from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view."*⁹ This "worldly point of view" is everything we took for granted, which too often took us away from God. Like cataracts on our eyes, our old prejudices, fears, and misshapen values caused our hearts to see people poorly. Now we belong to Jesus, and the Spirit is clearing our hearts, so we can see as Jesus does.

We heard: *"Christ's love compels us."* It's his self-giving love that led him to death for the sake of, instead of, and on behalf of everyone. Such is his love that now pushes us.

We heard: through Christ Jesus, God was reconciling us and the whole world to Godself. That relationship with God that we have twisted wrong, God-in-Jesus turns right. That which we tore, God mends. That which we diseased, God heals. Our wrongdoings toward

⁶ Charles Enman, "Obituary: Ken Taylor 1934-2015" [Ottawa Citizen](http://ottawacitizen.com/news/national/obituary-ken-taylor) (October 16, 2015). <http://ottawacitizen.com/news/national/obituary-ken-taylor>. Accessed October 27, 2015.

⁷ Colin Perkel, "Ken Taylor remembered as 'simply a legend' for his part in Iran rescue." [Toronto Star](http://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2015/10/27/ken-taylor-remembered-as-simply-a-legend-for-his-part-in-iran-rescue.html) (October 27, 2015). www.thestar.com/news/canada/2015/10/27/ken-taylor-remembered-as-simply-a-legend-for-his-part-in-iran-rescue.html. Accessed October 29, 2015.

⁸ Enman, [Obituary: Ken Taylor](#).

⁹ A more literal translation would be *"from a fleshy point of view."* This can be misleading, however. It suggests that Paul was speaking against things physical (flesh). For him, however, "flesh" was not about bodies. He did not have a hang-up about physical things. "Flesh" was how he talked about the ways the world works.

God and our wrongdoings toward our neighbours, God forgives. That's reconciliation.

VII

This reconciling God is the Sovereign who sends you. Jesus makes you his ambassador. Jesus makes you all together his embassy.¹⁰

By your very existence together, you represent Jesus. Instead of worldly suspicion, you are an embassy of generosity. Instead of fear, you are an embassy of hope. Instead of division you are an embassy of reconciliation. You are called "Unity" after all! Reconciliation is written on your sign. And reconciliation is written on you. When you are gathered together, you are Unity. And when you are apart, you are Unity. Because when gathered and when deployed, you are the embassy-church. Into your townships and villages, along country roads and lines, into your places of work, of volunteering, of learning and teaching . . . Jesus sends you. You are an embassy of Jesus Christ!

So with you, and for you, I give thanks to God! Amen.

¹⁰ Leslie Newbigin called the church "God's embassy in a specific place." He also wrote that "the only hermeneutic of the gospel, is a congregation of men and women who believe it and live by it." The Gospel in a Pluralist Society (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 229 and 227.